

Spiral-Dominated Compositions in Pare (Door Lintels)

By GILBERT ARCHEY

It is fortunate for our studies in Maori wood-carving that the *tohunga* or craftsman knew so precisely what he was doing, and that he developed his designs and patterns almost logically from a few basic forms.

Ultimately he achieved complete abstractions which, standing by themselves or seen in isolation, give no indication of their origin: for example the pattern of spirals alone on a feather-box or the chevrons of the Kaitaia carving. Nevertheless abstractions, if the word has meaning, have been drawn out from something, a something known to and understood by the artist; it is not surprising therefore to find in this art which so consciously and consistently stylised and abstracted from basic forms, certain phases of patterning which disclose the underlying realism. Attention was drawn to this in the writer's "Sculpture and Design" (1955; 2nd ed. 1960), and the theme has been further documented in more detailed studies.*

A preliminary glance through the photographic plates of the present contribution will disclose a greater uniformity among them than in the earlier described figure compositions (1960). With more than half presenting an almost uniform composition of three *tiki* (human figures) and six *pitau* (double spirals), (Plate 51), it might be thought redundant to illustrate so many. It has been done partly as a matter of record, but more to exemplify the manner of variation explored within one theme and the ingenuity displayed in manipulating natural forms as design elements.

Just why this particular composition should have been so favoured we cannot say. It might have been because it portrayed some popular story or was symbolic of some firmly prevailing notion or belief; on the other hand it might have been simply an art-preference for a satisfying harmony of stability and rhythm. This question of content or form as the stronger inspiration, and the allied question of the relative importance of social pressure or individual enterprise in art creation, will be left for brief discussion later. It seems desirable first simply to examine these *pare*, to analyse their composition and to see if resemblances or differences among them are such as to establish groups or sub-types.

Nevertheless, although direct description would appear to be the obvious first step, it will be seen I think that the nature of the composition is best revealed by pointing out its relationship to the figure-dominant pattern described in my previous paper. In that paper (1960, pp. 209 and 210, figs 8 and 9), I pointed out the general compositional similarity between the well known Hauraki lintel and an Arawa *pare*, i.e. a composition of figures and interlocking loops or spirals in both, figure-dominated in Hauraki and spiral-dominated in Arawa.

I now present below (Figs. 1 to 4) a closer grading of steps linking the one to the other.

**Tiki and Pou*, 1958; *Taurapa*, 1938; *Tauahu*, 1956; *Pare of Human Figure Composition*, 1960.



Text Fig. 1



Text Fig. 2



Text Fig. 3



Text Fig. 4

The compositional relationship between these four lintels will be readily apparent. We have previously (1960, Figs. 8 and 10a) made comparison between the present text-figures 1 and 2. The elements are fewer in the Taranaki *pare*, five figures as against nine in Figure 1, but they are larger, as also are the decorative loops and double spirals between them.

The *pare* of Figure 3 also has five figures, each outer one a *manaia* profile, plus a large *manaia* profile at either end of the narrow basal

bar. The figures are still in active attitudes as in the Hauraki carving, Fig. 1.

The composition of text-figure 4 is achieved by standing the three figures erect, enlarging the inner spirals, doubling the outer, and converting the already somewhat involved terminal figures of Fig. 3 into a light medley of stylized faces and limbs.

Figure 3 makes its first appearance, so far as I know, as this appropriate intermediate or connecting form. It is from a small photograph which Mr. C. Andrade of Bond Street gave me during a visit to London in 1937. On the back of the print is E1277/8 (a sale catalogue number?) which, with the photograph (Pl. 60 A) may help to locate the carving.

It is not suggested of course that the carvers of these four *pare* proceeded patiently and methodically from one composition to the other. They were done by different carvers, no doubt at different times and places. What they do reveal is that a carver in full knowledge of the basic theme, whatever it was, and aware of design possibilities, could have produced any one of them at any time. Could have: though whether any one carver would have been so widely versatile in personal accomplishment is another matter. Development of a style would have been gradual; community conservatism would probably have restrained enterprise. Nevertheless, stages achieved by a *tohunga* would have been copied by his apprentices and followed in later years; this is how schools have arisen throughout the history of art.

To return to the 'type' spiral-dominated *pare design*, text-figure 4; (also Pl. 51).

This it will be seen comprises a basal bar or *pae-kawau** with a *manaia* at either end; standing on the *pae-kawau* are three erect figures with arms aloft. The upper margin is gently curved, the sides or ends almost straight. Large steadily turning spirals lie between the upright figures, and beyond each lateral figure is a pair of small *pitau*. Readers will note the design competence in the diminution of amplitude of movement towards the ends. A still lighter lateral termination is achieved by smaller elements in an open-work pattern that can readily be resolved into faces and limbs, with an inward turning of the members to prevent the ends from appearing ragged. A further detail to be noted is that balancing or opposing the much stylized and outdrawn full face that forms the central element of the terminal pattern, there is a similar full face, outward looking, i.e. in the wide triangle between the upright *tiki*'s outer knee and the paired spirals. Another detail constantly present is the pattern of upright fingers of the hands of the main figures with their palms and thumbs appearing as *manaia*, whispering if you like in their owners' ears.

There is, as we have already noted, considerable similarity, almost uniformity, in these spiral-motive *pare*, and there is little need to particularise or discuss detail in respect to those illustrated in the first four pages of photographic plates.

The whole doorway, Pl. 51, is introduced to indicate the archi-

*Mr. Pei Te Hurinui Jones advises that *pae-kawau* more correctly denotes a bar one would walk under; *pae-pae* is a threshold on the ground.

tectural-compositional function of the main figures, i.e. they continue the upward line of the door-jamb (*whakarawae*).

Variation may be noted in the terminal *manaia* of the basal bar; its mouth is drawn out and pointed in Pl. 52 B and all of Plates 53 to 55, except in Pl. 55 A, where it is formed by a spirally turned upper lip conforming with the almost circular eye-border; in Plate 51 we see an interlocking of two rounded mouths each with a row of teeth.

There must be some difference in meaning among these compositions because where, as usually, the sex is indicated, the three figures may be all male; male, female, male; female, male, female; or all female.

It may be parochial pride on my part but I have long thought that the Arawa *pare* of Plate 51 is the finest that has been preserved; the remark is introduced partly as an invitation to you to look and disagree if you will. I myself will admit the Dominion Museum (Oldman Collection) lintel of Pl. 52 A as a close contender, particularly in respect to the vigorous *manaia* profiles that rise from either end of its basal *pae-kawau* and the alignment of its outstretched arms with the curve of the spirals. In both *pare* of Pl. 52, the figures, by their alert stance and arm position, refuse to be subordinated to the spinning of the spirals. The *tohunga* to whom we are indebted for these fine examples of Maori art we may be sure found pleasure in doing as well as pride in achievement; we would hope he received approbation and acclaim from the *hapu*.

In the *pare* of Pl. 56 the area occupied by the spirals is greater, either by way of an increase in their size (A) or in number (B), but without, I suggest, thereby gaining in ascendancy, because in the one (A) they are overlain by the arms and in the other (B) the figures bulk larger. A detail, which I have seen in only two out of twenty spiral-motive *pare* known to me, is the lateral border pattern of Pl. 56 B, the door-lintel of our large Ngati Maru meeting house Hotunui. This border can be shown to be a close repetition of the hand and finger stylization that commonly terminates the *maihi* (barge-boards) of house fronts, or surmounts the shaft of digging sticks, *ko*.

In turning to text figure 5 (see also Pl. 57 B) we pass from small variations in detail to a considerable difference in composition. Here are *pare* with only one, central, upright figure; this is flanked on either side by only one double spiral; observe, too, that the composition is closed laterally by the 'opposed *manaia*' device, the same that is found commonly in figure-motive *pare* (cf. text figures 5 and 6).



Text Fig. 5



Text Fig. 6

Comparison of these two compositions as we see them here will reveal their fundamental similarity; the only difference is that in the one (Fig. 6) the design elements flanking the central figure are human figures and in the other (Fig. 5) they are double spirals (*pitau*).

A similar alternation or interchange of these design elements can be seen in two other types of spiral-motive *pare* compositions. The first is in text figure 7 where the elements next to, i.e. outside the lateral



Text Fig. 7

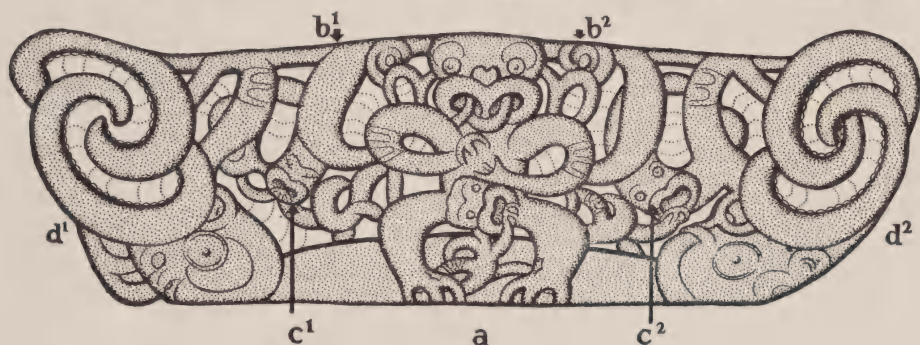


Text Fig. 8

upright figures is a figure motive instead of the customary pair of double spirals as in Fig. 4. The lintel of Fig. 7 has another unusual feature: a single large *manaia* face profile at either end.

The second example, text figure 8, offers us a double comparison. In the first place it will be seen to match Fig. 5, except that at either end it has a large *manaia* face profile instead of the *manaia*-combat

motive. Secondly, in respect to its terminal *manaia* face profile it can stand alongside Fig. 9, but differs in having large double spirals where Fig. 9, has a figure motive. Once again we see the place of figure details in the one composition being occupied by spirals in the other, and I submit that the interchange between these two design elements recurs too consistently in too many kinds of composition to be a coincidence. It occurs within the spiral motive group of *pare*; it appears as between

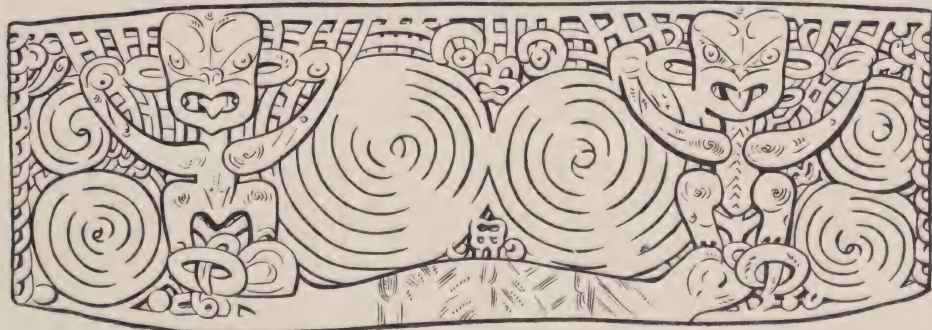


Text Fig. 9

the spiral design *pare* and the figure design lintels; a similar consistent interchange has been demonstrated in trapezoid canoe prows (Archey 1955 2 ed. 1960). These interchanges could hardly be without reason or significance, and, as I have commented previously (*ibid*), these repeatedly alternating elements must surely have meant the same thing to the Maori carver.

The version of the spiral dominant *pare* illustrated in Pl. 58 A is new in both senses, novel and present day. It is the door lintel of Taki-timu, the great house at Wairoa, completed in 1939. It will be seen that its carvers Pine and John Taiapa not only made their large double spirals from elongated whole animals in *manaia* form known as *koro-pepe*, but lengthened the whole composition by placing small partial *manaia* (I count five) around them. The large terminals are not opposed *manaia* but a single one, with a foot or tail, also a *manaia*, which could, if you wish stand in place of the customary terminal *manaia* of the basal *pae-karwau*. While this may seem complicated in the reading, the details can be readily followed in the illustration.

In our final examples (Figs. 10 and 11) we see two degrees or stages of closing up the whole design. In Fig. 10 (also Pl. 59 A) the



Text Fig. 10



Text Fig. 11

full-sized naturalistic central figure has been reduced or squeezed out to allow room for the carver to make a pair of *pītau* his central feature. All that is left of the figure is a well-rendered openwork full face, and there is a subsidiary face filling the lower triangle between the spirals. The end detail of this *pare* seems to be a succession of eyes, not of fingers as in Pl. 56 B, or the uppermost loop could be a *manaia* eye and the remainder a chain of arms.

In Fig. 11 (also Pl. 59 B) we see no central figure, only a single much expanded *pītau*. Could it be said that the small figure elements above the *pac-kawau* (between the spiral and the remaining upright figures) represent the dismembered and displaced central figure? A further interesting detail is that the customary central face of the terminal end pattern of the *para* is here supported by stylized limbs, without however a body. A second example of this composition is illustrated in Pl. 60 B.

Altogether I find this an interesting and pleasing design and I know I am supported in this view by one whose opinion I value, though I, myself, should have preferred the spiral in the first mentioned not to have been somewhat flattened. May it be agreed also that a design in which one great spiral becomes the leading element in the composition makes a not inappropriate ending to our series, a series which commenced you will remember, with a design where figures and spirals were in equal emphasis (Fig. 3; Pl. 60 A), a series, too, which is readily linked back to a troupe of lively naturalistic figures standing out from a background of lightly carved interlocking loops (Fig. 1).

Few of our *pare* are of known place of origin, and these are all from one area, the Rotorua-Bay of Plenty district; being also all of the "type" composition of three figures with six spirals, they merely inform us that the type was in favour in the district. The *pare* with a pair of central spirals and the one with a single central spiral came to the Auckland Museum with a large collection made mainly in the Rotorua district, but the smaller single-centre-spiral *pare* is of the Sir George Grey collection and might have come from anywhere. We are without evidence, therefore, for any regional affiliations or type areas for spiral-motive *pare*, such as we had, though in small degree, with figure-motive *pare* compositions.

Style areas, then, seeming not to be defined, our interest returns to the composition itself, to its general stability and its adherence to the

basic arrangement of most Maori compositions, the *tiki-manaia* alternation.

All through the variation or variety within this group the fundamental composition of alternate figures and spirals is maintained, as we saw an alternation of naturalistic and stylized figures maintained in the group of figure-prevailing *pare*.

Once again we find our Maori carver exploring different avenues of design but always with logical or at least systematic adherence to his basic theme. This brings us to another issue: was there any firmly held meaning, any presentation of well established narrative or symbolism in this composition that has been so consistently followed?

In turning to enquire what, or who, these forms represent, we are at a disadvantage, even at a loss because, apart from the reply to leading enquiry that the *manaia* was a fabulous water monster, we have almost nothing on record to tell us.

The general arrangement or composition is the same in all *pare* — a central figure, a pair of opposed *manaia* at either end, with a succession of human figures or an alternation of figures and spirals in between. Where *manaia* are introduced, they participate in the alternation or rhythm, which may then be of figures and *manaia*; of full faces and heads in profile (*manaia*); of figures and spirals; or of figure-spiral-*manaia*-spiral-figure-spiral . . . and so on. In the more abstract renderings of this constant composition, the spirals themselves are sometimes merely interlocking loops, elsewhere large double-spirals, *pitau*.

In respect to meaning the possibilities are: either that all *pare* have one constant meaning or story,* the variations being purely in art design; or that it was customary or permissible to attach any story of present happening or of history or legend to this one general composition.

As an instance of contemporary events being depicted in a standard composition we refer to the then newly carved house at Taupo in Plate 25 of *The New Zealanders Illustrated* (1847). Angus tells us that it was built by the Chief Puatia to commemorate the taking of Maketu by Waharoa in 1836† (White, 1888). The carved figures of the house front stood for warriors who had distinguished themselves, but the prowess commemorated was not all of this engagement. Thus, Wakatau (topmost gable figure) fell at Maketu, but Puke (the figure immediately below him) was killed at Rotorua; the *amo* (upright side-supports of the veranda front) were the Ngaiterangi chief Tareha killed at Tauranga and Hikareia a Tauranga chief killed at Te Tumu. The lower figure of the centre-post was Taipari one of the outstanding fighters at Maketu; its upper figure was Tara, slain at Taranaki.

The significance here for meaning or symbolism lies not so much in this mixed recording of persons but in the fact that we have a narrative of the time superimposed on the long accepted symbolism of house-front decoration or construction. In this, as generally given, the paramount tribal leader or ancestor is the figure surmounting the apex

*Not altogether constant, with the sexes varying as they do: cf. *supra*, p.

†For this date and for checking the spelling of some of the following names I am once more indebted to Mr. Pei Te Hurinui Jones.

of the barge-boards, or he may be the figure looking down from the front of the great ridge pole (Hotunui in our carved house of that name); the barge-boards (*maihi*) are his arms (or bosom as told me by Bishop W. L. Williams), the ridge-pole his back-bone, and the *poupou* (wall carvings) his ribs. In other words the house is the paramount leader with the succeeding tribal ancestors (*poupou*). We were made well aware of this when, immediately after Ngati Maru had decided that Hotunui was to come to the Auckland Museum and we were discussing the problem of transporting the 80 ft. ridge pole, some one, a pakeha to be sure, said, "You'll have to cut it." "What!" was the aghast exclamation, "cut Hotunui's back-bone!"

And yet, notwithstanding this clearly understood symbolism of the house-front, it could also, if Angus had it aright in 1847, be persons involved in present day events.

The same liberty in the attribution of meaning was exercised four years ago at the ceremonial opening of the Naiterangi communal house, Tamateapokaiwhenua, when the naming of its carvings embraced cosmogeny, legend, and what might be called Maori national history as well as tribal ancestry.

The Souvenir Booklet (1958), tells us that the right hand *amo* (looking out from the front of the house) portrays Tane-mahuta separating the primal parents, Rangi and Papa: the left hand post presents exploits of Maui-tikitiki-a-Taranga; the *maihi* carry the story of the explorers Kupe and Ngahue chasing the pet octopus of the old Hawaiki *tohunga*, Maturangi. As a courtesy to the Tainui canoe, the central veranda post carvings commemorate Turongo and his wife, Mahinerangi, already well known as house names on the Turangawaewae *mare* at Ngaruawahia. Among the *poupou* of the porch are Kahungungu, a son of Tamatea-pokaiwhenua and founder of the great Ngati-Kahungungu tribe, and Taurikura a Ngaiterangi ancestress who sulked and turned herself into the first tuatara! The taiaha-armed figure surmounting the gable, Tahuri-wakanui, is a skilled warrior of not long ago.

The concept that the whole house is itself the tribe is maintained, according to an authority mentioned but not named in the booklet, by the *kowhaiwhai* (rafter patterns) linking the spirit of the *tahuhu* (ridge pole) with the carved ancestral figures of the *poupou* (wall posts).

While on the subject of symbolism in architectural decoration, we may refer to the quite obvious meaning of *pataka* barge-board design, i.e. of a long creature, whale, shark, or seal, being dragged up to the storehouse by three or four men, or *manaia*. Whether this was simply a standard narrative presentation of the idea of filling a food store, or whether it could also be given a specific individual reference to a particular event, we do not know; and it is to be hoped that the raising of the question will not result in the production of an 'explanation' from some doubtful legendary source.

Returning to the *pare*, we cannot but suppose that its composition carried some meaning and symbolism, either of tribal history or of some well established idea. But whether it was the same underlying narrative for all, or an independent symbolic presentation for each one, we cannot say.

Implicit in the problem of meaning in the present connection is the further question: as to whether community influence or individual enterprise is the stronger motivating force in art production. Contemporary painters and sculptors claim, or hope, that their work is creative self-expression, or assume that self-expression is their right as artists. While the latter will be generally conceded, there may be doubts among psychologists whether the former is invariably so; but in respect to primitive art we are constantly reminded by social anthropologists that the tribal community bears heavily upon its members.

'Meaning' here is a wide subject in fact and theory; its full consideration would call for a definition of the aesthetic object with a review of its characteristics and an enquiry into the nature of the aesthetic response. At the moment we will go no further than to offer a few conjectural or speculative comments which may serve to indicate some aspects of the problem.

On thinking of the meaning of an art object we early become aware of the two components of art, content and form, and, if we take cover from the difficulty of comprehending the 'significance' in Clive Bell's Significant Form, we see meaning expressed primarily in content. This content could be a group of persons, a narrative of events, a statement of a moral or a religious situation, any of which could be set forth in naturalistic realism hardly imbued with what could be called art expression.

We discern community influence in, say, a grouping of persons in respect to social status, the leader at the centre or made larger for prominence; grouping can however be done with a balance or rhythm that invokes aesthetic response, whereby we discern form and recognize art composition rather than social arrangement.

Form itself, having become a matter of interest — we do not at the moment suggest for whom — gains in importance and becomes developed in the categories of rhythm, decoration or ornament, stylization or abstraction.

Our question, then, is: by whose influence or whose initiative, by the community's or the artist's, does form gain this ascendancy? It is generally held that the simplified outline of a lion, with maybe some emphasis here and diminution there, is more acceptable on a heraldic shield than a natural drawing. Was it the community's need for clear and ready recognition that brought about this stylization, or was it the individual artist's own interest in winning form as such from out of the first seen realism?

As decorative complexity such as we have seen in our door-lintels develops and expands, is it the artist himself who goes one further and one still further in elaboration, or does the community's attention, interest, and enthusiasm for something richer hurry him along?

One can perhaps more readily see the community influence as conservative, as being more concerned to preserve easily recognizable meaning; but one can still ask: could the simplified or stylized form become more effective as symbolic expression, through the very aesthetic effect achieved by the artists abstraction?

On the other hand, could the artist, involved in ornament or constrained by the potential abstraction he envisages in form, *qua* form,

come to find himself (or his public find him) remote from common understanding and acceptance? We can understand popular interest being taken in the complexity and liveliness of spirals in the *pare* we have been seeing; but had this overclouded the original meaning of the *pare* composition?

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Text Fig. 12

Or, turning to the Kaitaia lintel, could its carver have gone too far, either away from meaning or towards pure design? Could there have been members of the Maori community, who, Philistines before their own Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth, and bemused by their inability to recognize meaning in the Kaitaia design, failed to discern its abstract rhythm? And would they be few or many?

The questions here posed could bristle with controversy, and leaving them unanswered may appear ineffective; but something is thereby left to think upon and perchance to study.

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Complete carved doorway. The *pare* is described (p. 273) as the 'type' of spiral-dominated composition.

Doorway: Rotorua. A.M. 184.
Length of *pare* 127 cm.

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A

B

A. Locality unknown. Dominion Museum, Oldman Coll.

B. *Parc* of house Rangitihi. Rotorua. A.M. 5152. L. 165 cm.

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A

B

A. Locality unknown. British Museum.

B. Maketu. A.M. 5168. L. 112 cm.

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A

B

A. Locality unknown. British Museum.

B. Rotorua district. A.M. L. 190 cm.

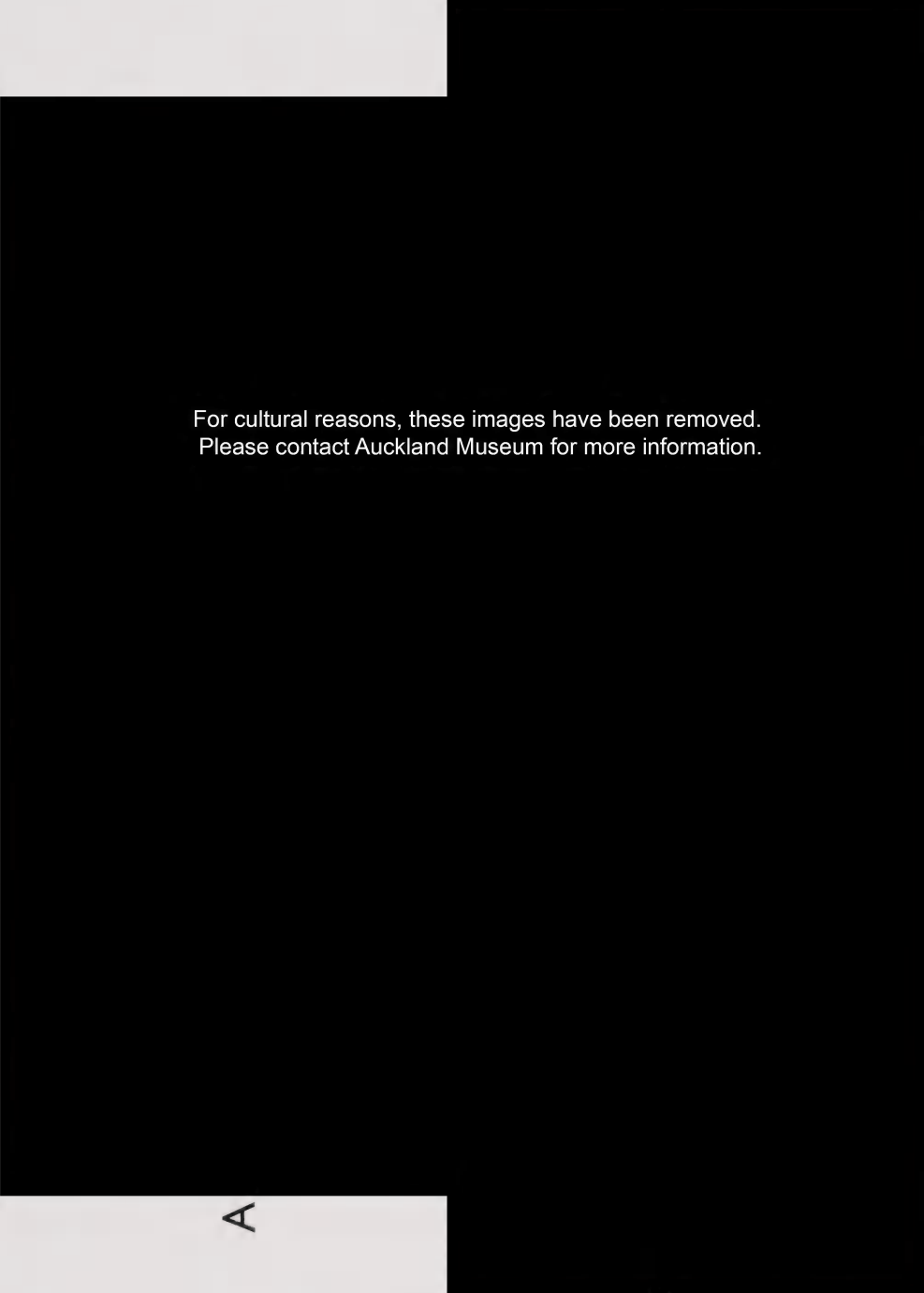
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A

B

A. Locality unknown. University Museum, Philadelphia.

B. Locality unknown. A.M. 186. L. 135 cm.



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A

B

The spirals enlarged, but without dominating the figures.

A. Locality unknown. Dominion Museum.

B. Carved at Whakatane. Ngati Maru house Hotunui, in Auckland Museum.
L. 376 cm.

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A**B**

Pare with only one central figure and two spirals. The *manaia*-combat device at either end in B. is as seen in figure-motive *pare*; in A. it is replaced by a large open *manaia* profile.

A. Locality unknown. British Museum.

B. Locality unknown. A.M. 104. L. 98 cm.

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A

B

A. A modern (1939) variation of the single central figure composition (B).

A. *Parc* of house Takitimu at Wairoa. Carved by Pine and John Taiapa, 1939.

B. Locality unknown. Dominion Museum.

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A

B

Pare with a single large spiral, or a pair, as the central motive.

A. Locality unknown. A.M. No. 1. L. 122.5 cm.

B. Locality unknown. A.M. 3. L. 120 cm.

For cultural reasons, these images have been removed.
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A

B

A. *Pare* with figures and spirals equally prominent. cf. text figures 1 to 4. Locality and present place of deposition unknown. Photograph, numbered E. 1277/8 on back; from Mr. C. Andrade, Bond St., London, 1937.

B. *Pare* with single spiral central motive. Locality unknown. A.M. 21884.1, Sir Geo. Grey Coll. L. 99 cm.